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FM AMEMBASSY SUVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0226
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1752
RUEHKN/AMEMBASSY KOLONIA 0208
RUEHMJ/AMEMBASSY MAJURO 0650
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1324
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1522
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0484
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0891
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SUVA 000397

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/07/2017
TAGS: [EWWT](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [ASEC](#) [KR](#)
SUBJECT: KIRIBATI'S SHIP REGISTRY SYSTEM -- MORE DETAIL

REF: SUVA 386

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (SBU) The Republic of Kiribati has hired a Singapore company as agent to license commercial ships under the Kiribati flag. When we raised the matter with Kiribati President Tong on July 20, he acknowledged that traditionally Kiribati had handled its own ship-registry service which only dealt with commercial ships plying the vast Kiribati EEZ in the Pacific. However, having observed that some other nations were apparently making money via off-shore ship registries, Kiribati decided to try its hand. Currently Kiribati has registered 48 ships via the Singapore office, and Tong made clear his goal is "many more." Secretary for Communication, Transport, and Tourism, David Yeeting, gave a similar account.

¶2. (SBU) We noted to both Tong and Yeeting the USG interest that ship registries be carefully overseen so as not to facilitate international crime or terrorism. Both understood the message. Yeeting told us Kiribati chose the same Singapore agent that Tuvalu has used, in part because the agent has a very responsible reputation. The agent reportedly does background checks and "elaborate screening" of prospective registrations. Following up on e-mail advice from INR/EAP, we asked if Kiribati could provide data on what ships are under Kiribati registry. We recalled an incident last year in which a merchant ship flying the Kiribati flag was boarded by U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf. At the time, the Government of Kiribati saw an internet report of the incident and realized no legitimately flagged Kiribati ship was in the Persian Gulf. However, at the time of boarding, U.S. forces did not have that information. Up to date sharing of information would be of real use in U.S. anti-criminal efforts on the high seas. Both Tong and Yeeting said they were confident data-sharing arrangements could be made. They asked what details the U.S. would need. Yeeting noted that the Australian Government has also raised an interest in ship-registry access.

¶3. (C) PACOM's J5 Pacific Desk Director participated in the meetings. In the meeting with Yeeting, she described an agreement with the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) that allows U.S. forces expedited approval to board RMI-registered vessels for law-enforcement purposes. Might Kiribati also be amenable to such an arrangement? Yeeting said he would be glad to consider such a proposal if the USG wishes to present it.

Action request

14. (C) Assuming Kiribati-flagging information can help in USG efforts against international crime, Washington may wish to consult with the Australian Government on a joint effort to obtain and share up-to-date information from Kiribati on ships in its Singapore-based registry. If an agreement similar to that with the RMI is of interest, please advise next steps.
DINGER